



These two long established local societies have always had a strong interest in the Heritage of Burnley and its neighbouring towns and villages and are pleased to support the Heritage Open days Week 2024.

This evening's talk is presented by Tony Mitchell-who has been a member of both societies for many years. His interest in railways began in his childhood and continues today with his keen promotion of SELRAP-the campaign that is looking to reopen the Skipton to Colne railway line, as part of connecting the Lancashire town of Colne to the North Yorkshire town of Skipton

This article was published in 1986 for the Burnley & District Historical Annual publication of 'Retrospect' It has now been updated.

THE RAILWAYS OF BURNLEY: A SHORT HISTORY

In the mid nineteenth century, a fever was sweeping the length and breadth of the British Isles. Unlike previous fevers this one did not kill people or send them scurrying behind bolted doors for fear of infection. Yet in its social consequences it became more far reaching than the Black Death. The fever was 'Railway Mania'. It made millionaires of a few and ruined many more. It spread iron, and later steel, rails like a spider's web across the map of Britain, and it changed people's lives in a way that no other historic development had ever done before or since.

Speculators with money to back them (and some who were lamentably short of money!) rushed to Parliament for Acts to authorise the construction of railways. Every community, large and small, would benefit from this miracle of communication and the blossoming industrial towns of East Lancashire were prime targets for such schemes.

In 1840 Burnley was becoming an important industrial centre. The weaving industry was expanding and was being transformed from a largely domestic, cottage industry, to a highly organised mill system relying on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and the ancient packhorse routes for its major links with the outside world.

Clearly a Railway system would transform the carriage of goods in and out of the town. Raw cotton, which took several days

to transport by canal from Liverpool, could be in the area a few hours after unloading from the ships. Finished goods could be despatched with equal speed. The coal mining industry, which was to grow in line with industrial development, would find a quick and cost-effective method of shipment to its customers. Coal, originally mined and used only on a local basis, would find new and expanding markets throughout the land. In addition to all this, the inhabitants of the town would eventually find new freedom to travel which was to have an unrivalled impact on their lives. From 1840 to 1870 the population of Burnley doubled to almost 50,000 and doubled again up the end of the century, reflecting the tremendous expansion of industry and commerce made possible by the railways.

The first railway reached Burnley in 1848, when, on the 16th of September East Lancashire Railway Locomotive No 2 named 'Roach' and No 28, 'Lucifer' pulled two First Class carriages into Burnley Barracks Station. On-board was Captain Wynne of the Board of Trade who declared the line satisfactory. Burnley Barracks was the temporary end of the line authorised by the East Lancashire Railway Act on 30th June 1845 and known as the Blackburn, Burnley, Accrington and Colne Extension Railway.

It was a further 10 weeks, on 1st December 1848, that the 15 arches of the viaduct to Burnley Bank Top Station were completed and trains were able to reach the centre of the town. The occasion was celebrated by the provision of ale for the navvies who carried out the work, a surfeit of which caused a riot in the town.

The provision of the act of 1845 was for the line to make an end-on junction with the Midland Railway's branch line from Skipton to Colne. The Midland had reached Colne in October 1848 but, because of various hold-ups which had plagued the East Lancashire line from the outset, it was not until the 1st February 1849 that the section from Bank Top to Colne was completed with stations at Brierfield and Nelson. From the very beginning traffic on the line increased rapidly. Within months it was possible to travel to Liverpool and Manchester in little over an hour and, for working people, the coast at Blackpool, Morecambe and Southport came within easy reach.

Whilst the East Lancashire line was being constructed from the west, moves were afoot to build another line coming into the town from the east.

The Manchester and Leeds Railway, whose main line ran through Todmorden, projected a line through the Cliviger Gorge to Burnley and on the 30th of June 1845, this line was authorised by act of Parliament.

Due to various problems work proceeded very slowly. There were financial difficulties, and the M and L decided to change the original single track to a double line. There was also a change of management at Manchester during which, in 1847, the 'Manchester and Leeds'

became the 'Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway'.

The new masters quickly reversed the original double track decision. Preferring to build all the railway works (cuttings, tunnels, bridges, et cetera) to double track standard, but to lay only a single line. Suffice to say, it was 12th November 1849, under the auspices of the L & Y R, that the line was opened from a junction $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile east of the Todmorden station to Burnley Thorneybank Station.

In September 1850 this was extended westwards to Gannow Junction to meet the East Lancashire Railway. Thus, one of the country's most spectacular railways was completed. From Todmorden, it climbed for 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles through Portsmouth station to Copy Pit Summit at 749 feet above sea level. It then descended through Holme and Towneley stations into Burnley and included spectacular engineering works such as Kitson Wood, Holme, and Towneley tunnels and Knot Wood Viaduct. There was also a timber viaduct carrying the single line shortly before reaching Thorneybank Station.

During the following years, due to increases in traffic, several improvements were made to the line. The whole route was doubled and the timber viaduct at Burnley was replaced by an embankment in July 1860 when an intensified service was inaugurated. Also, to allow through working from West Yorkshire, a spur was built from Stansfield Hall to Hall Royd at Todmorden. This obviated the need for trains to reverse at Todmorden Station to gain the Burnley line and provided an important East – West route still used today by the Blackpool - York service and as a diversionary route. Further improvements were the building of a

station to serve Cornholme and the replacement of Thorneybank with a larger and better sited Manchester Road Station.

The last railway line to be constructed in the Burnley area was the North Lancashire Loop which was authorised by two acts of Parliament in 1866 and 1867. This was a bypass line from Rose Grove through Padiham, Simonstone, and Great Harwood rejoining the main Accrington – Blackburn line East of Blackburn station and so avoiding congestion at Accrington. Construction seems to have been beset with engineering problems particularly during the building of the major structure on the line, the Martholme Viaduct. After a period of goods-only working to prove the track bed and settle the rails, the first passenger train left Rose Grove on 15th October 1877, running through to Blackburn.

In 1859, the East Lancashire Railway Co was absorbed by the Lancashire and Yorkshire, and from that time various improvements were made to the local railways.

About the turn of the century, Rose Grove was completely transformed by rebuilding and extending the station facilities, laying a massive marshalling yard on each side of the main line and the construction of a large engine shed on the downside of the line, west of the station.

Train services from Colne were gradually improved and in 1905 a through service to London Euston was introduced, travelling via Blackburn, Bolton and Stockport, where the coaches were attached to a London & Northwestern Railway, Manchester to Euston express. More important to local people, a railmotor

service was inaugurated the following year between Burnley and Colne. New halts were opened at New Hall Bridge, Reedley Hallows, and Bott Lane Nelson. This was in direct competition with local trams and, being quicker, was very successful. The service was affectionately known as "The Puffing Billy", becoming a household name, and an important part in local life for generations.

When the London, Midland and Scottish Railway took over in 1922, services continued to improve and remained in a healthy financial state until the Second World War. In 1944, Burnley Bank Top was renamed, Burnley Central, but otherwise little changed until nationalisation in 1947.

Competition from road transport now began to take its toll. First victims were the Halts opened for the Puffing Billy service. New Hall Bridge closed in 1948, followed by Reedley Hallows and Bott Lane in 1956. In the early 1960s, the rot really set in. The through London services were cut. Strangely, at this time, the goods facilities at Central Station were modernised with new goods sheds and overhead cranes. This was despite an obvious drastic reduction in rail freight traffic and the whole complex was demolished within a few years, the site being sold for commercial development.

On the Todmorden line, the intermediate stations at Home and Cornholme had been closed in the 1930s. Stansfield Hall went in 1944, Towneley in 1952, Portsmouth in 1958. The final blow was the abandonment of Manchester Road Station on the 6th of November 1961. For years the line carried no passenger traffic except seaside excursions from Yorkshire.

The engine shed at Rose Grove was always the home of heavy freight and shunting engines used to transport local mineral traffic and general goods (Accrington being the main passenger engine shed). Its importance declined along with mining in the area and the general rundown of BR freight services. It was one of the last three sheds in Britain to retain steam locomotives, and its official closure coincided with the end of steam traction on British Railways on the 5th of August 1968. Diesel locomotives were stabled there for some time afterwards, but it was finally demolished in February 1975 and now the M65 motorway runs through the site. The vast marshalling yard at Rose Grove has been dismantled and the area on both sides of the railway are now used for commercial purposes.

The once proud railway system of Northeast Lancashire now remains an epitaph to railway mismanagement and negative short-term thinking.

Someone said, (of the Settle to Carlisle railway) "Use it or lose it". Only history will tell if the people of Burnley got a revitalised railway, but then lost it because they did not use it.

It is up to you and me.

Tony Mitchell.

WHAT THE RAILWAY DID FOR BURNLEY. (AND EVERYWHERE ELSE FOR THAT MATTER!)

If you lived in Burnley during the first ten years of Queen Victoria's reign (1837 to 1847) what sort of town would you be living in? Well for a start, you would most likely be literally living, working and spending your life within the town. Ordinary working people spent their whole lives within the immediate vicinity of their dwelling and working places. Many people rarely ventured more than a few miles from their homes and didn't know what was over the hill or what the next town looked like. But you would be living in a rapidly changing town. Although travel was beyond the pocket of most ordinary folk it was possible to venture to other places. Your options would be to travel by horse-drawn coach or, more slowly, by cart. Maybe you could borrow a horse or simply walk. The Leeds and Liverpool canal was well established and would be ideal for a trip to places along its length, but it was primarily built for transporting goods. Whichever you chose, your journey would be a long one, never exceeding more than a few miles per hour.

The town was busy with the first period of industrialisation. From 1842, when parliament allowed extraction of water from canals for steam engines, mills were being built along each side of the canal through Burnley. Hand loom weavers were in sharp decline as economics drove them into the mills. Families who scratched out a living by farming and weaving at home were driven into the town to work in the mills. The Irish potato famine which started

in 1845 forced people to leave their homeland to find work in the north of England. As a result, the population of Burnley rose from about 12,000 in 1837 to 21,000 in 1851. It was to increase to around 100,000 in the next 50 years.

This rapid increase led to terrible living conditions in the centre of the town. Squalid insanitary back-to-back and cellar dwellings were erected around the ever-increasing mills. Mining of coal became an essential occupation to feed the voracious consumption by mill engines and home fires. Miners from The Dales and Cornwall, where the lead and tin mines were exhausted, migrated to the Lancashire towns to find work in the collieries, adding to the crush of humanity in an already overstretched small area.

Food was very mundane. The staple diet of working people was an oatmeal porridge made with skimmed milk rarely supplemented by potatoes or salted meat, all food that could be acquired locally. Because of the living conditions, hard long hours of work and poor diet, life expectancy was low and infant mortality was high.

But things were changing. The population had seen the building of the canal but in the mid 1840s Burnley inhabitants could see the massive new earthworks of the coming railway appearing in and around the town. Most prominently the gigantic viaduct being constructed across the

valley of the River Calder. People had never seen such a structure before and were in awe of its immense size. By September 1848 the railway had reached Barracks Station. Once the viaduct was completed, Bank Top station (latterly named Central) was linked to the system and in February 1849 the line met the Midland Railway at Colne making a through route to Skipton and beyond. Also, in 1849 the line through the Cliviger Valley was completed making a connection with the Manchester and Leeds railway at Todmorden.

The effects of this new mode of transport soon became clear. Industry in Burnley had been expanding but was held back because of poor transport and communications but the railway was a catalyst for expansion. Whereas movement of raw cotton and other goods from Liverpool docks had taken four days, now it could be achieved in 2 hours. Similarly, manufactured goods could be on the Manchester markets in the same time. Business simply exploded. More and bigger mills, foundries and workshops were established. For the workers this meant security of employment. Part time casual workers were taken on full time with more work and better wages. Opportunities for advancement in skilled work, particularly in engineering, were now a very real possibility and employees had the means to look around for better wages and terms of employment.

Because fresh produce could be transported quickly into the town, a more varied and healthier diet was possible. (But only for those who could afford it.) One striking example was fresh fish. Most people had rarely, if ever, tasted fish. Now it was on the markets within hours of being

caught. Fish and chips became a firm favourite amongst the working classes. The ports around Britain's coast blossomed because of the fish trains. Merchants could sell fresh fish in iced containers to large markets such as London hundreds of miles away. Express fish trains were given priority equal to the fastest passenger expresses.

Strawberries from Cornwall, raspberries and whisky from Scotland, hops for brewing from Kent, potatoes from Pembroke, apples from Somerset, and so on. All were readily available if you had the money. And gradually people did have the money although most of the time it was hard fought for from reluctant mill owners.

The railways made it possible to travel to the seaside and as a consequence small coastal village grew into popular seaside resorts with investments in accommodation and attractions. The railways made possible the development of Blackpool, Morecambe, Scarborough and the rest. It was also easy to get into the countryside so places such as Bolton Priory, Malham and Ingleton flourished and town folk who spent most of their lives under a cloud of dust and smoke could occasionally get some fresh air. Catering for the upper end of the social scale, the spa towns owed their popularity to the coming of the railways. Although some had been established for hundreds of years, indeed since the Romans, they were now easily accessible so that towns including Buxton, Harrogate, Bath and Strathpeffer in Scotland became the fashionable destinations for the rich and famous (and those aspiring to be rich and famous!). The factory Act of 1850 gave Burnley workers more leisure time and railway journeys became much more frequent. However,

not many Burnley people would be heading for the luxury hotels in the spas! The railway companies actually created towns. Places such as Crewe, Swindon and Horwich were sleepy little hamlets until they became important junctions on the railway system. Great engineering works employing thousands with surrounding housing, and public buildings quickly appeared and most of the inhabitants worked for the railway company with their lives regulated by the employers from cradle to grave.

Architecture progressed from the mundane to the gloriously expansive as the railway companies built magnificent stations. St. Pancras, Manchester Central and York are examples. The flamboyant railway hotels were in another world compared to the old coaching inns. Imagine what people thought on first seeing the Midland Hotel in Manchester and the vast area under a glass roof at Central Station across the road.

Rowland Hill had introduced the Penny Post in 1840, but letters sent any great distance had to rely on mail coaches and could take days to be delivered. The railways changed all that and communication across the land greatly improved and expanded. In 1870 the post card became the popular method of communication and cards posted early morning would often arrive shortly after lunchtime. (And all for one half penny). Try doing that today!

Very soon mill owners and the more prosperous people found that they could establish homes outside the town, even by the coast, and could commute to their mills and factories every day. Special luxurious "Club Trains" were introduced

Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway.

GRAND DAY TRIP
On Monday, August 6th,
TO
BLACKPOOL

ALTHAM'S TRIP ON ABOVE DATE LEAVES	a.m.	FARE
Burnley (Bank Top)	6-30	3/-
Burnley (Barracks)	6-35	

Returning from Blackpool (Tallbot Road) at 6-50 p.m.

Those going by my Trip to Blackpool will be admitted to the North Pier there (which is now the finest in the world), on payment of 1d. for a Special Ticket, which can be obtained at time of purchasing their Railway Ticket. The usual charge for each person is 2d.

Tickets can be had at my Establishment,
MARKET PLACE, BURNLEY.
ABM. ALTHAM,
Wholesale and Retail Tea Merchant.
George Frankland, Printer, &c., Bull Street, Burnley.

which were fast, limited stop, expresses requiring annual subscriptions. Eventually commuting became a way of life for thousands of workers particularly around the major cities. Miles of ribbon development appeared along the railway as it progressed out into the countryside. The prominent example of this was "Metroland" of John Betjeman fame, which was a string of new towns stretching into the Chilterns and served by the Metropolitan Railway from Marylebone Station in London.

Another effect of travelling at greater speed on the railway was the need to synchronize time throughout the land. Previously, when it had taken a long time to get anywhere, it didn't matter if clocks at your destination differed from those at home. Time was set by local authorities according to the

position of the Sun. Bristol, for instance, was 10 minutes behind London and the difference was greater the further west you went. By 1847 the railways set all their clocks at Greenwich Mean Time so that the timetables made more sense. By the time the trains began to run in Burnley GMT was accepted as standard. In general, this was known as "Railway Time", and everyone now worked with this time.

Newspapers became truly "national" once the railway network began to spread. Papers printed in London, Manchester, Glasgow and other big cities were rushed out to the far corners of the country and could be on the doorsteps the following morning. Thus, the population became far more aware of national and worldwide affairs, and this led to a whole new problem for the government. The nation's leaders had been in the cosy position of keeping the populace in relative ignorance and could tell the people only what they wanted them to know. Even then it could take days for the news to reach most places. Now those papers which were opposed to the ruling party could present a different perspective on current affairs and would have their views read within hours. The government feared the new connectivity between groups of people around the country. Revolution in other countries was still fresh in the memories of those who ruled the country and the Chartist Movement was gaining wide support. People could now travel to large gatherings to protest but on the other hand troops could be despatched quickly by rail to problem areas. Wars were completely transformed by railways. Movement of troops and equipment to the front lines of conflict were now much quicker. The mechanised war was invented. The

contribution of railways in war time cannot be underestimated and railway installations were prime targets for the enemy.

Certain individuals whom we would call "Nimbys" protested that the beautiful places in which they lived would be overrun by unwashed, uneducated and rowdy hordes from the towns. William Wordsworth was the most prominent of these and he did all he could to stop the railways blighting his beloved Windermere, Keswick and Coniston. In spite of his constant objections the iron rails did reach these places and people flocked to see the wonders of the Lake District.

An unusual effect of the new long-distance travel was known as "alternative families". Train drivers, firemen and guards often had to travel long distances and stay overnight at their destinations. Some met women and set up second families unknown to both their "wives" many miles apart!

Another negative effect of the Railway boom was the staggering number of people who were ruined by unwise investments in schemes which would never have been successful. There was no effective government control over railway building and as rails spread to every corner of the country promoters came up with hare-brained schemes for railways that would never be viable. Probably the most famous victim of this was Charlotte Bronte who lost all her savings in one such scheme.

In case I have given you the impression that the railway brought social utopia to the working people of Burnley, I admit this was far from the truth. The effects were gradual,

and it would be decades before ordinary working people were able to escape the poor conditions and grinding toil that blighted their lives. As with most things the prosperous benefited first but, at least, the Railway provided the means to improve the lot of mankind. In Burnley the coming of the railway was instrumental in the town becoming the largest manufacturer of woven textiles in the world.

All these things affected lives in the second half of the 19th century but the most immediate effect, the one which had the

greatest impact on people's senses, was the sheer speed that one could travel. In a world where progress was minimal and everyone was used to seeing things pass slowly by, moving at up to 60 miles per hour was frightening to most people. Some predicted that the rush of air at such speeds would be suffocating and accidents were all too frequent until adequate signalling was introduced. Queen Victoria forbade her royal train driver to exceed 20 miles per hour until she was reassured after a number of journeys.

Robert Louis Stevenson expressed his astonishment at this new breathtaking speed:

FROM A RAILWAY CARRIAGE

Faster than fairies, faster than witches
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle,
All of the sights of the hill and the plain,
Fly as quick as driving rain;
And ever again in the wink of an eye
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes.
And here is the green for the stringing of daisies!
Here is a cart run away in the road,
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill, and there is a river:
Each a glimpse and gone forever.

Tony Mitchell.

HERITAGE TALKS & TOURS



4th Sept 2024
7pm
Burnley Town Hall

The Development of Burnley's Railways:
An illustrated talk by Tony Mitchell considering the far reaching social changes that the railway brought to the town.

9th Sept 2024
6.30pm
St Peter's Church

St Peter's Church Tour:
A guided tour of the church and possibly graveyard by local historian Roger Frost. Meet at the entrance to the church.

11th Sept 2024
7pm
Burnley Town Hall

Burnley Now and Then:
A talk by Edward Walton- journey across Burnley from station to station to explore how the town has changed over 120 years.

13th Sept 2024
1pm-2.30pm
Burnley Town Hall

The Story of Burnley at the Peak of its Victorian Importance:
A guided tour with local historian Roger Frost. Meet outside Burnley Town Hall.

For more information please visit:
burnleycivictrust.org.uk
burnleyhistoricalsociety.org
heritageopendays.org.uk

Burnley & District
Historical Society



heritage open days